

Famed Lawyer Blasts Hoover

Belli Calls FBI Director 'Fatuous Old Dictator'

By DON LEWIS

San Francisco attorney Melvin M. Belli Friday night called Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover "a fatuous old dictator" and charged that Hoover "has set up a little storm troop empire."

Belli, the man who defended Jack Ruby when he was tried in 1964 for murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, was interviewed at Antoine's Restaurant, 713 St. Louis.

The 60-year-old attorney said the only reason the FBI director has been reappointed to his post is because "he has had so much on presidents that they didn't have the guts to kick him out."

"They knew that if Hoover were removed from office he would come back to haunt them through speeches and books with embarrassing contents," Belli said.

Soured Long Ago

Belli called Hoover "utterly and completely vicious" and said he started "to go sour on him long ago when I saw how afraid FBI agents were of their master."

"FBI agents on the witness stand have lied many times," Belli said. "They go with the party what brung 'em," Belli added, "and they're not going to testify against their chief."

Belli said he is one of a number of attorneys who have had FBI agents checking into their past.

Turning to District Attorney Jim Garrison's probe of the Kennedy assassination, Belli said: "I was close to Ruby and I just don't think he (Garrison) has anything."

"What he's got, I on't know," Belli said. "I'm waiting like the rest of the world to see," he added.

"If he falls flat on his face," Belli said, "I'll be the one guy to say he had the guts to try and he had the right to try to investigate the assassination."

Belli termed Garrison "a very good friend of mine" and "a terrific trial lawyer."

"Garrison is an honest man



—Photo by The Times-Picayune.
MELVIN M. BELLI
Blasts J. Edgar Hoover

and I would be a character witness for him anytime," he said.

BACKS COMMISSION

Belli said, however, that he still accepts the Warren Commission findings that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed President John F. Kennedy.

"I'll believe it until Garrison can prove to the contrary," he said. "I'm still receptive, but he hasn't convinced me," Belli said.

Commenting on the continuing attempts of Clay L. Shaw's attorneys to get a change of venue for their client, Belli said: "I think New Orleans is like San Francisco—the people in the two cities are the most tolerant in the world."

"If I were a defense lawyer," Belli said, "I wouldn't want to move the trial."

FORMER CLIENT

Referring to his former client, Jack Ruby, Belli said:

"He was a status seeker . . . a climber who wanted to belong to society."

Belli said flatly: "I think the guy was nuts."

The California attorney said Ruby told him that "he did it (killed Oswald) for Jackie and the kids. This was Rubys rationalization for the act," Belli said. "This is absolutely not true."

Belli described Ruby as a "psychomotor epileptic" and said "what turned him on" were television strobe lights in the basement of police headquarters in Dallas, Tex.

"When the lights came on," Belli said, "they brought about his seizure" and Ruby shot Oswald.

Oswald was shot and fatally wounded Nov. 24, 1963.

Belli described District Judge Joe Brown, who presided over Ruby's tempestuous trial in 1964, as "a warrior with a big heart and a great personality."

Belli said, however, that Brown "never claimed to be a great lawyer. He should never have presided over the trial," Belli said.

Ruby received the death sentence in Judge Brown's court but the conviction was later reversed. Judge Brown died Tuesday following a heart attack. Ruby died of cancer Jan. 3, 1967.

Belli, who has been conducting a running feud with the American Bar Association, said: "The ABA doesn't like me because I don't belong to the establishment."

"I'm a member of the ABA," Belli said, "and since they've tried to kick me out, I wouldn't quit for the world."

The California attorney has just returned to the United States from Vietnam after writing a series on military justice for a wire service and has written a new book, "The Law Revolt."

As to how he would do in court against Raymond Burr of "Perry Mason" fame, Belli said: "I'm afraid I wouldn't do very well — he's a client of mine."

Belli leaves New Orleans at 9 a. m. Saturday to attend a meeting of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers in Boca Raton, Fla. He was the first dean of the organization and one of the founders.